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ABSTRACT

Three types of English classes conducted by foreigners in Harbin, Northeast China, are described. These classes for English teachers, for students, and for science teachers are described in three separate chapters. The section on English teacher training classes discusses goals, the composition of the student body, the differences between classes at liberal arts universities and those at scientific institutes, and methodology. The second section describes classes conducted for science teachers at universities and institutes. The emphasis is on a description of course content, emphasis on listening and speaking skills, texts used, and teaching techniques. The student classes are discussed in a third part. It is noted that these classes were not as high a priority as those for teacher training, and if a foreign teacher was not available they would be taught by Chinese student-teachers. A final chapter gives some indications on other English language related activities foreign teachers are asked to engage in, such as lectures, making tape recordings, and advising English teachers. (AMH)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING BY FOREIGNERS IN HARBIN, NORTHEAST CHINA

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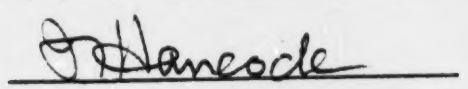

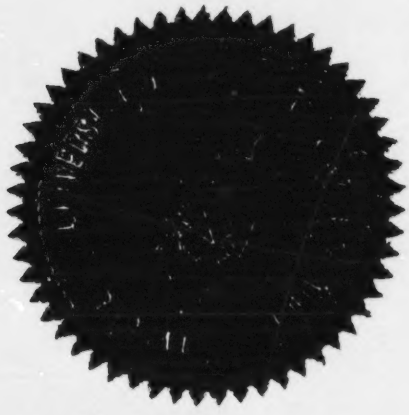

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING BY FOREIGNERS IN HARBIN, NORTHEAST CHINA

BY

ANN ELISE BISHOP, B.A.

REPORT

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Figure 1. The People's Republic of China

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO HARBIN

Harbin is the capital of Heilongjiang Province, the northeasternmost province in the People's Republic of China. It is an industrial city with a population of over two million. From July, 1979 until July, 1981, I was employed by Harbin University of Science and Technology to teach English. The purpose of this report is to describe the role of foreign experts in English language teaching in Harbin. ("Foreign expert" is the official designation used by the Chinese government for foreign teachers.) This report will discuss the types of classes being conducted, the materials, methods and goals of the classes, and other English language related activities carried out by foreign experts.

Since the normalization of relations between the governments of the People's Republic of China and the United States in January, 1979, an increasing number of American foreign experts have been hired to teach English. The first of these teachers went to China in late 1978, and more began their contracts in the first half of 1979. The number seemed to skyrocket in 1980 and 1981 as the Chinese made provision for exchange programs and the placement of foreign experts in more universities and institutes.

When I arrived in Harbin in 1979, there were two other foreign teachers in the city (one American, one Canadian)

both teaching English. By the time I left in 1981, there were approximately 12 foreigners teaching English. The following institutes and universities in Harbin employed foreign experts for English language teaching during those two years:

Heilongjiang University (the Provincial liberal arts university)
Harbin University of Science and Technology
Harbin Institute of Technology
Harbin Civil Engineering and Architectural Institute
Harbin Electrical Engineering Institute
Harbin Educational Bureau

The institutions hiring foreigners in Harbin were of three types:

1. a liberal arts university, which had a Foreign Language Department, where students could major in English
2. scientific and technical institutes, where students majored in scientific specialities but studied English as a second language, usually for two years
3. a city educational bureau, which was responsible for (among other things) training English teachers for high schools (called middle schools in China)

Foreign experts were expected to conduct English language classes, to aid in preparation of materials, to give periodic lectures, and to do some tape recording. In addition, they were expected to field questions on a wide range of subjects, to act as resource persons for anything related to the English language, and to act as informal cultural diplomats. In the case of the majority of the institutions in Harbin, these foreign teachers were either the first to ever be hired or the first to be employed since Liberation in 1949. Heilongjiang University was an exception to this, as it had employed British and Canadian teachers since the 1960's. In general, however, the presence of foreign teachers was a new phenomenon and was treated as the extremely significant political and educational event that it was.

The situation of foreign experts was both similar and dissimilar to other places in China. Such large cities as Peking and Shanghai had a longer history of employing foreign experts, and there were larger numbers of them in large cities like those. Consequently, universities and institutes in those places were often (but not always) better equipped to utilize foreign teachers effectively. Universities, especially those in the provinces, which had never employed a foreign expert before often spent a good deal of time figuring out what should be taught and how. In these universities especially, there was the tendency to

believe that the presence of a native English speaker would ensure that all teachers and students would become fluent English speakers. There was also the tendency to believe that these native speakers could lecture knowledgeably on any subject or at least act as arbiter on any question of grammar. As more and more foreign teachers go to China, their role and especially their limitations will surely become more clearly defined.

Because Harbin is one of four cities in China that are centers of heavy industry, there are many four-year technical institutes there. The majority of institutes hiring foreign teachers were not liberal arts universities, as occurs in other large cities in China. The teaching program at these institutes differs from that of either language institutes or liberal arts universities.

There were similarities, however, between the role of foreign teachers in Harbin and other places in China. The general types of classes being conducted there were similar to those conducted in other places, and the problems relating to teaching were also similar.

In Harbin, there were three types of English classes being conducted by foreigners: classes for English teachers, for students, and for science teachers. English teacher training involved both university and middle school teachers. Students classes were of two types: those for students majoring in English and those for students studying

science or technical subjects. Classes conducted for science teachers aimed usually at either preparing the scientists to go abroad or improving their general knowledge of English.

CHAPTER 2

ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING CLASSES

One of the main responsibilities of foreign experts teaching English was to train English teachers. During the spring of 1981, at least six foreign teachers in Harbin were teaching English teachers. The goal of these classes, as articulated by the university administrators, was most often to "raise the level of English." Sometimes, however, more specific goals for English teachers' classes were to improve listening and speaking ability, to learn new teaching methods, and to learn letter and report writing. Goals basically came from two levels: the highest university administrators (President and Vice-President) and from the leader of the English Department or English Teaching Office (a smaller organizational unit with a department). There was a good bit of leeway in negotiating about what was actually to be done in the classroom. Goals from university administrators were usually general enough to allow for further discussion with the departmental leader about more specific objectives to be carried out.

5.

The English teachers fell into two groups according to background: those who had previously taught Russian and who switched to English during the 50's or 60's, and those younger teachers who had attended university during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and who were called Worker-Peasant-Soldier-Students.

Those who taught Russian or who were Russian translators learned it by an oral-aural method and had had frequent opportunities to work with Soviet experts who were in China from 1954-1961. With the Sino Soviet split in the early 1960's, they began studying English instead. Their training in English consisted of some formal language training and a lot of "self-study."

Those teachers who attended university during the Cultural Revolution studied only three years, much of which time was devoted to labor and military training, hence the W-P-S-S designation. Both groups had experiened frequent interruptions in whatever formal education they had had in English.

The English teachers who were in the university level teacher-training classes normally taught students. At scientific and technical institutes, they taught students approximately four hours per week, and students studied English for two years. The traditional method was used the majority of the time, with attendant emphasis on grammar, memorization, and translation. The purpose of these classes

was to teach the students to read (usually scientific texts) in English and to do translation.

The level of the teachers who taught these students varied widely. Some who had received little training in English were barely one step ahead in the text they were teaching. Others would have been fluent speakers of English except for the lack of information about and contact with the rest of the English speaking world.

These English teachers used two different sorts of texts in their classes, depending on whether they were teaching English majors or science students. Those at scientific institutes usually used a Chinese-prepared text intended for science students. It contained short passages about simple scientific principles, detailed explanations of grammar and vocabulary, and many exercises in translation. With this text, Chinese was usually the language of instruction in the classroom. At some universities, especially where there were students majoring in English, teachers used British or American texts.

English classes at liberal arts universities differed somewhat from those at scientific institutes. Usually, English majors had courses in intensive and extensive reading, listening and speaking, grammar, and sometimes literature.

At five institutes in Harbin, foreign teachers were conducting teacher training classes for English teachers. While participating in the class, the teachers usually had no other teaching responsibilities, though this was not always the case. The rationale for choosing who got into these classes differed. At Harbin University of Science and Technology, all English teachers had one year to study, though two chose not to do so. At Harbin Institute of Technology, not all English teachers were getting to study. It is difficult to say how teachers were chosen. One foreign teacher figured that it was their turn "in the scheme of things." This is a politic way of saying that a combination of political, educational, and social considerations figured into the selection of class members.

In most of the teacher training classes there seemed to be a wide range of ability levels, usually intermediate to advanced. There was also a wide range in terms of the teachers' general knowledge of other fields and of the world in general. Most had an extensive and formidable knowledge of grammar which they used unstintingly in their teaching and which formed the mainstay of their knowledge of English. The weakest skills seemed to be speaking and listening comprehension. Many teachers had never heard a native speaker of English except on tape, VOA, or the BBC. In addition, some were very limited in reading comprehension. At my university, one teacher was quite frank in telling me

that she had never had to read to comprehend before, only to parse sentences.

There were several considerations particular to the situation that were a factor in deciding on course objectives and content. One was the fact that few materials were available. Though all the foreign experts had brought materials with them, the only way to reproduce them was by typing stencils and running them off. Most universities had a typist to do this, but it took a long time and you could not be sure when you would actually get them. More often than not, this was a slow process that involved many trips to the typist and the printing office. At some universities, foreign teachers had no problem getting their materials reprinted, but at two universities, foreign teachers were typing all materials for use in their classes.

Some British and American textbooks were available in Chinese reprinted editions. In 1979, English 900, Linguaphone, New Concept English, and Kernel Lessons Intermediate were available. In 1980, English for Today and Realistic English were reprinted. As only a very limited number of these texts were available in the bookstores, they were sometimes ordered from other cities or were typed and duplicated.

Another consideration in deciding on course content was teacher expectations. Many teachers did not mind learning things they might not necessarily use in later

teaching students but some did. At at least two institutes, some of the teachers were mainly concerned with finishing those texts they might have to later teach or answer student questions about. This seemed to be a common concern; as the students get better and better, the teachers are more and more concerned with simply being able to answer their students' questions about the texts, even if those texts are not used in the classroom. This happened especially with the English for Today series, as it was a relatively recent American series, and Americans were visibly the majority of native English speaking foreigners in Harbin. No matter what text was used, it was important to have a main textbook and to stick to the text and finish it. Progress was often as not measured by how many books one had finished.

Rather than devising a separate syllabus for classes, foreign teachers used the main text for the class as a functional sort of syllabus. Since a concern of all classes was to have a text and finish it, the contents of it were easily adapted for use as a syllabus.

Besides wanting to be able to answer student questions, English teachers were concerned with being able to carry on conversation in English both with their students and colleagues. Though students did not necessarily learn spoken English as part of their appointed curriculum, most

were eager to learn to speak and unafraid to try. Since many of the teachers had had little or no training in this area, they found it necessary to practice this skill, if for no other reason than to meet their own students' needs.

One way in which the English teacher training classes varied was in whether or not they included any teaching of methodology. At Harbin Institute of Technology, two foreign experts had been sent on exchange from a language program at California State University at Los Angeles, ostensibly to teach methodology to English teachers. The teachers in the class, however, wanted an advanced language course. Though the teachers did practice such techniques as substitution drills and minimal pairs, they were not really amenable to the idea of learning new methodology and preferred to stick strictly to the text. At Harbin Architectural and Civil Engineering Institute, however, the teachers' class did involve some teaching of methodology that was quite successful. The teachers practiced how to use dialogues, tapes, and visual aids in their own classes, and discussed how to use English more in the classroom.

There are a couple of problems in this matter of acceptance of new methodology. Some teachers are quite interested in seeing and learning about different methods, but not interested in using them in class. There are some very good reasons for this. Because the texts they use are chosen by the university for them and because the texts seem

to dictate using the traditional method, they are afraid that if they use new methods, they will not meet their students' needs. It is extremely important to these teachers that they turn out students who know what is required to pass the state examinations. Until now that has meant being able to read and translate; there has been no need for new methods. Others seemed to see no necessity for change from the grammar/translation emphasis; when a change in methodology is called for, the university leaders will instruct them to that effect. Underlying both of these attitudes is frequently a lack of self-confidence in using English for instruction in the classroom.

This situation is changing, however. Teachers are becoming aware that other teaching methods do exist. There are more and more foreigners who are teaching and lecturing in English on all subjects. In the two years I was teaching in China, the number of foreign experts more than doubled. More and more students are being sent abroad to study and do research. Learning to speak English is practically the national hobby in the cities. But at the university teaching level there is some confusion: while new methods may be needed to meet these new language needs, the dictate has not yet come from "above" as to how to teach. Until some policy is formulated there will probably continue to be some hesitation in deciding whether or not to include methodology in English teacher training classes.

Procedure for English Teacher Training Classes

While all the foreign teachers used slightly different materials, there were a number of materials that were used by a majority of the teachers. Presentation procedure differed also from teacher to teacher, but here again there were certain things in common in most classes. Because the English teachers had by and large only been exposed to the traditional method, and because of Chinese traditional ideas about education, classroom techniques were chosen with these two factors in mind.

The size of the classes usually varied from 11 to 18 students. Class time was between 12 and 16 hours per week. Usually the classes met for three hours at a time in the mornings, with a 20-minute break. Each class chose a monitor, who was responsible for representing the class suggestions to the teacher and making sure that all class members had the proper attitude toward their study.

English for Today (McGraw-Hill) was one of the most common texts used, especially Books 5 and 6 of the series. Presentation would include an oral introduction to the background of the reading passage, a review of the main ideas in the passage, an explanation of unfamiliar idioms and vocabulary, and some discussion of the passage.

The background introduction to the reading passage was an important part of the lesson because the cultural material in the readings was very unfamiliar. This

introduction often formed a large part of the lesson and, indeed, of the whole course. One of the strongest teacher expectations was that they would learn about the culture that was part of this language they were teaching, but cultural adaptation was very difficult because there often seemed to be little way to relate some of the material to Chinese Socialist society. One alternative was to skip certain units that contained material that was particularly difficult to adapt (e.g., English for Today, Book 5, which contains a unit about rock music bands breaking their instruments on stage during a concert). This was not satisfactory, however, as the teachers felt it important to study every unit. The result of trying to introduce and teach some of this material was that the teachers ended up with lots of notes about some strange phenomenon and no context into which to fit them.

Usually the reading passage was gone through paragraph by paragraph to explain main ideas, vocabulary, and idioms. Some classes read the text aloud, and others paraphrased information or answered questions about the passage. Much attention was paid to vocabulary and idioms, and teachers often memorized all items, regardless of frequency. Quite a few examples of how to use the word or idiom in context were presented, and most foreign teachers would select certain items to be learned and would disregard the rest. Vocabulary work in small groups, vocabulary

competitions, and other exercises helped to reinforce new vocabulary. While the text did contain some exercises for certain grammar points, they were generally very repetitive and below the level of grammar required for the reading.

Grammar questions inevitably arose, and foreign teachers used several strategies to deal with them. One solution was to refer to the questions as the "resident grammarian" in the class (and there was always one). Another solution was to answer those that posed special problems in comprehending the reading, and then deal with the rest of them after class. Though all the foreign experts had some knowledge of grammar, the teachers in the class were usually far more used to parsing sentences.

The level of reading comprehension of these teachers varied considerably, with the lowest level among the intermediate teachers. Many had great difficulty in recognizing the main idea of the paragraph or entire passage. There was a tendency among many to read word by word with a dictionary, even the first time through. The poorer readers seemed to believe that they had to understand every word to understand the paragraph, and no explanation of redundancy changed that belief.

Several techniques were used to help with reading comprehension. Exercises on learning how to guess the meaning of words from context were very helpful in proving to

teachers that they could choose a similar meaning without having to consult a dictionary. Another technique was a reading session where teachers could read first without using a dictionary. They would then estimate the percentage they thought they had understood and take a 5-item true-false quiz. Then they would reread using a dictionary. One class did several hours of home reading each week, keeping track of how many pages they read and how long it took them. At the end of a book, they would write a bit about it. The problem here was finding enough materials at a suitable level, especially graded readers, which were what some teachers were most comfortable with.

Besides texts like English for Today and readers such as American Topics (Prentice-Hall), most foreign experts used other materials for listening comprehension, teacher-made exercises, or both. The speed at which native speakers spoke and reduced forms and numbers caused the most problems in listening. Several classes used Improving Aural Comprehension (Joan Morley, University of Michigan Press) and Listening in the Real World, both in and out of class. The American Embassy distributed copies of Time and Tune in American English with the accompanying records, and this was used in several classes for practice in stress and intonation.

Foreign experts were often expected to give enough homework to keep the class busy during the afternoon hours,

and this time was often used for listening to tapes. In addition to the tapes accompanying the above listening materials, foreign teachers were usually requested to make tapes of the reading passages and of any other reading materials the school might be using. Some teachers made tapes based on their daily lessons so that they could be used for review. In general, foreign teachers did a lot of taping, both of texts they used and of others being used at the school.

There were two problems with using tape recordings. The first was that during the winter power cuts were very frequent. At one school, four days a week electricity was only available before 7 a.m. and after 5 p.m. One foreign teacher finally had to abandon using a set of tapes as an outside assignment because the teachers were not in the classroom during the hours the electricity was on. The second problem concerned the teachers' semi-reverential attitude toward tape recorders and tapes. It was often believed that just listening to something over and over would improve over-all listening comprehension, even if the material was not what would normally be heard. The taping of passages intended for reading comprehension seemed unnecessary to many of the foreign teachers, but was often insisted upon by class members. The desire of the class to have on tape every utterance by a native speaker is understandable, considering the novelty of native speakers, but

there was frequent disagreement as to the effectiveness of this practice.

Pronunciation of the sounds of English received attention in class, but phonology was not usually taught separately. Pronunciation of citation forms, reduced forms, and choral repetition of words, phrases, and sentences to practice certain sounds or intonation patterns was a common practice. The teachers all knew at least one of the various systems for representing the sounds of English.

Middle School Teachers Training Class

Two foreign experts were employed by the City Education Bureau to teach middle school teachers at the Harbin Education Institute. The bureau conducts training classes for teachers of all subjects taught in middle school, but English was the only subject foreigners taught. The purpose of the class was to give middle school teachers a chance to improve their English skills. Theoretically, only middle school teachers were to be in the classes, but others entered the class through the "backdoor."

The goals for the class according to the leadership of the bureau were to:

1. make the teachers more fluent in English
2. improve stress and intonation
3. practice reading, writing, listening, and speaking in class
4. "learn the commonest habitual usage and idioms"

(goals taken from a personal letter to the experts).

Each training class lasted for 12 weeks and had 30 to 33 teachers. Classes met for 15 hours per week in the morning and six hours per week in the afternoon. There were three such classes during the 1981-82 school year.

Half of the teachers in the class had gone to college, and the rest had gone to a two-year training school. Those members of the class who were not middle school teachers had usually had some education beyond middle school. Being a middle school teachers is not regarded as a particularly good or prestigious job, except if one is at a "key" middle school. Low job status, combined with the fact that the teachers cannot transfer out of the middle school system, made for some problems in the class.

To enter the class, both a written and oral exam were required, but these were not conducted by the foreign teachers. According to them, a well-placed favor could substitute for taking the exams. While the bureau did notify middle schools about the exams, not all teachers were free to take the exams. At key middle schools, for example, the better teachers are needed so badly that they cannot be let go to spend 12 weeks in a training classes. Frequently, after teachers were admitted to the class, they would be withdrawn because they were needed back at their school.

The Progressive Reading Series, a U.S.I.A. publication, was used in these classes, and it served as a functional sort of syllabus. It was chosen because it was available, it was fairly apolitical, and could serve as a basis for conversation. Readings and accompanying exercises were assigned for homework and were discussed in class. The six afternoon class hours were devoted to small groups for conversation practice.

The foreigners who taught these classes commented that, in the main, the class expected to be entertained. Because class performance had no effect on the teachers' chances of getting a different job, class members saw it as a vacation from their teaching. Assignments made in class were frequently not completed at home. The class was a marked contrast to other classes taught by foreign teachers, where class members were usually very motivated and hard-working.

During the first term, there was a wide range of ability and levels, and no grouping of teachers. By the third term, the classes were divided, with one foreign expert teaching the slower group and the other teacher the faster group. They felt that because of the size of the classes, the range in ability, and the lack of motivation, the goals could hardly even begin to be approached.

This problem of ability level and size of classes highlights an expectation that I found with regard to almost

all classes taught by foreigners, namely, that the teachers should teach to the top of the class. Sometimes this expectation was made explicit, and sometimes it was implicit. Because of the great numbers of teachers, the attitude seemed to be that those who were good language learners should have the chance to learn all they could, and the others should struggle along as best they could. The slower language learners did not seem to take exception to this, but, rather, usually seemed glad just to have the chance to be in the class.

These two foreign teachers had two other problems that seemed to be unique to their situation. One was that they were teaching 21 hours per week (in five days) for 12 weeks at a time, with a one-week break between new sets of teachers. During the year that they taught, they did not have the normal three- to four-week winter vacation in February. Their heavy load of classroom hours, in addition to lesson planning and correcting papers, meant that they never had the chance to have a good rest and a complete change of scene. The second problem was that their school was located in the most crowded section of town, right next to the train tracks. Harbin is the rail center for the northeast part of the country, and trains went by within feet of their classroom at frequent and regular intervals. Whether the windows were open or closed did not matter, as the classrooms were all concrete and so acoustically live

that it was usually difficult to hear even under the best of circumstances.

CHAPTER 3

SCIENCE TEACHERS TRAINING CLASSES

Of the seven universities and institutes in Harbin that employed foreigners, five of them conducted English classes for teachers who taught scientific specialties. Heilongjiang University and Harbin Education Bureau did not conduct this type of English class. The goals outlined for these classes varied between instiutes: at at least two institutes, the class was intended to prepare class members to go abroad to do scientific research and study. At one university, it was understood that some of the science teachers might perhaps go abroad, but this was only a very tentative possibility.

Why then were these classes conducted, if the scientists were not sure of going abroad? First, there might be that chance of being selected for that honor. If a university had a larger pool of scientists equipped with the necessary language skills, the university would have a better chance perhaps at being granted this opportunity. Second, it was felt that if science teachers knew some English, it would help them professionally and raise student

consciousness about the importance of English for the transfer of technology to China. This second goal seemed more in keeping with the actual situation. That is, probably less than 10% of those science teachers in the classes would actually go abroad, and that small percentage would be chosen on many bases other than that of their participation in the class or even general English language ability.

One way in which all the science teachers' classes were similar was in their emphasis on speaking and listening skills. Many class members could read English before entering the class, and most had studied grammar, in general the strongest point among class members.

Each class had from 20 to 30 members. However, class hours per week varied considerably. The number of hours that classes of science teachers met depended almost entirely on the number of foreign teachers at an institute and the number of science teachers to be trained. At two institutes, the classes had to be divided because there was too wide a range of ability levels. At Harbin Architectural and Civil Engineering Institute, for example, there were 24 teachers in the group, but they were split into two groups and had six hours per week with the foreign teacher there. At Harbin Institute of Technology, the 26 science teachers were also divided into two groups. Originally, they had been scheduled for six class hours per week, but

after the division, each group received four and one-half hours of instruction per week. At Harbin University of Science and Technology, by comparison, the science teachers had 18 hours per week of instruction. Though there was also a wide range of ability levels at this latter institute, the science teachers did not want to be divided into two groups.

The tremendous range of ability levels was one of the most serious problems to contend with in teaching science teachers. While some teachers might come to the class with no speaking skills whatsoever, others were able to carry on conversations on a variety of topics when they entered the class. Division of a class into two groups also usually meant some increase of teaching hours and lesson preparation for the teacher. The two foreign teachers who did manage to divide their class felt that the ease of teaching after the division compensated for the extra contact hours.

At at least four of the universities and institutes that conducted science teacher training classes, English for Today was used as the main text, and as such, constituted the syllabus for the course. Two classes began with Book 2 of the series, and one class began with Book 3 of the series. Though often other texts and materials were used to supplement this, it formed the core of the class preparation.

Other materials used in these classes included American Topics, a reader designed to introduce various facets of American culture and to improve reading comprehension. Listening in the Real World and graded exercises for aural comprehension were also used.

Discussion, group work, role plays, and pattern drills were among the techniques used in classes to present the materials. The vast majority of class members were 40 to 55 years old and had not been in a language learning situation for at least 15 years. Consequently, any technique that would encourage them to overcome their hesitancy in using the language was considered appropriate. Though ESP classes were not conducted at any of the universities, the scientists especially enjoyed learning those vocabulary words pertaining to their own particular specialty, and teachers tried to capitalize on this interest.

CHAPTER 4

STUDENT CLASSES

In addition to classes for English and science teachers, foreigners also taught classes for students. Heilongjiang University, as the provincial liberal arts university, was the only one that conducted classes for students who were English majors, the rest of the classes

being for students who were majoring in scientific specialties. Again, with the exception of Heilongjiang University, student classes met for fewer hours per week and were considerably larger than those for teachers.

At all the universities and institutes in Harbin, the students in these classes were senior students. They were unusual in that they were the first class of students to be admitted to university after the reinstatement of entrance examinations following the 10 years of the Cultural Revolution. They were slightly older than average and were literally among the very best China had to offer in terms of university youth.

Teaching English to students was not as high a priority as teaching teachers, and at universities where there was only one foreign teacher, there often was no student class. For one thing, it was a more efficient use of time to raise the level of teachers, and, for another, students had other classes to attend.

The organization of students into classes differed widely between universities. At Harbin Institute of Technology, one foreign teacher taught 50 students who were divided into three groups, each group for three hours per week with an additional hour for conversation when all could attend. At Harbin University of Science and Technology, there was one class with 16 students, and they met for four hours per week. Harbin Architectural and Civil

Engineering Institute had the largest student class, which was conducted on closed-circuit television. A rotating group of 15 students sat in the studio for the class, and 200 more students sat in an auditorium. The students in the studio group took an examination to be admitted to that group, and while all other students were welcome to watch in the auditorium, only 140 copies of the class material were sold, in order to limit participation.

All of the students had to take an examination to be admitted to their various classes, but test scores were not the only criterion used. It was considered important to have students from each major at the university and to have both male and female students in the class. So, while an entrance examination was an important determinant for admittance to the class, these scores were often overridden by considerations of having a broad representation of students.

Almost without exception, the students in these classes were highly motivated, took their classes very seriously, and availed themselves of every opportunity for contact with foreign teachers. For students at scientific institutes, there was additional motivation because of the fact that listening and speaking skills in English could possibly mean the chance to study abroad later. Most had studied English formally for at least two years, in addition to "self-study," which consisted of studying available texts,

listening to foreign language broadcasts, and even taking spare-time English classes.

In teaching students, foreign teachers used materials that would lend themselves especially to practice in listening and speaking. These included texts such as Listening/Dictation, English for Today, and the Lado English Series. Students were unafraid to use their English and delighted in dialogues, role plays, and debates. They were full of questions on all topics and frequently sought out teachers after class for additional conversation. Foreign experts who taught students generally commented that these were the classes they had always dreamed of but never expected to have.

CHAPTER 5

OTHER ENGLISH LANGUAGE RELATED ACTIVITIES

Besides conducting class, most foreign teachers were involved in other language related activities. The most common of these were lectures. At one university, foreign teachers lectured on a regular basis; at two other universities, the lectures were not on a regular basis.

Lectures were popular with students and teachers alike for several reasons. The most important reason was probably novelty, i.e., seeing and hearing a foreigner talk on some subject. From the point of view of university

leadership, it seemed a good way to make English available to many people and to take advantage of the prestige that came with a university having a foreign teacher.

Topics ranged from religion to the vowel sounds in American English. History was a popular topic, and at one university, there was a lecture series on trends in 20th century western literature. Just about any subject, except a highly political one, was considered fair game for lectures, and attendance at them was consistently good.

The main difficulty in giving lectures was the time involved in their preparation, assuming, of course, that the foreign teacher had adequate materials available. The other main problem was that of gearing it to the level of the audience, which varied widely. This foreign teacher gave weekly one-hour lectures for one semester and decided that the results did not warrant the effort involved. Lectures were a minimum of one hour, and school leaders would not have objected to two- to three-hour lectures. Students and teachers from throughout the city attended, from beginning learners to teachers. The result was that only a small percentage could understand the subject matter as presented in English, and the rest fell asleep or left. Presentation of ideas was very difficult, given the vacuum of background information that the listeners had. Because listeners were not responsible for any of the information in the lecture, the lectures often were nothing more than

public performances that took a great deal of time to rehearse and stage.

At Harbin Institute of Technology, one foreign teacher who had considerable experience in television and videotaping was involved in making videotapes for English language instruction. The first one, a lesson on vocabulary, had been completed, but he felt that there was considerable resistance to the idea. The videotape equipment was not being used otherwise, partly because of lack of technical expertise on the part of the workers responsible for it and partly because of the concern that, if the machinery were used, it would deteriorate faster.

Two other related activities that all teachers were involved with on an informal basis were tape recording and advising English teachers. Advising usually took the form of answering questions about lessons teachers were about to teach, distinguishing between similar vocabulary items, and explaining contexts in which unfamiliar idioms might occur. Requests for tape recordings came from teachers, students, leaders, and friends. While these activities were not accounted for in the teaching schedule, they were constant and time-consuming obligations that foreign teachers were expected to fulfill.

During the time just before and after the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China, the trend in hiring teachers was to employ persons who were "friends

of China"--that is, persons who had displayed some interest in and sympathy with China. This was followed by a trend toward hiring increasingly qualified EFL teachers. Once again, the situation is changing, with a view now toward hiring teachers who are experienced in teaching literature, composition, and creative writing to American students. This reflects both the Chinese government's anticipation of the increasing level of English ability among teachers and students and the desire to raise standards in foreign language departments in universities.

There is still, however, quite a demand for EFL teachers, and the bureaucratic mechanisms for hiring those teachers are beginning to smooth out somewhat. Universities may now hire teachers directly (with the requisite permission from the government), and this has seemed to expedite the filling of teaching positions.

One of the greatest needs that remains to be explored now is how these foreign teachers may be most effectively used. There was in Harbin very little done in the way of specific needs assessment with regard to English at the university level. The tendency was to have foreign teachers concentrate on speaking and listening comprehension skills, often without a clear idea as to why these skills were needed. As teachers and students of English in China become more proficient, finer and finer distinctions as regards specific language skills will be

needed if foreign teachers are to be worth the cost. Along with the refinement of needs assessment, it is hoped that there will be a more systematic approach to meeting those needs. This would help to avoid unnecessary duplication of teaching efforts and could mean a more comprehensive knowledge of English among teachers and students.

After 30 years of isolation from most English-speaking countries, China is in many ways still discovering what the English language is. During those years, English was something of an artifact: a language used in books but not spoken much, a language that essentially did not change. The presence of foreign teachers, as much as helping to raise basic skill levels, has helped to make people aware of the wide range of uses of English. What remains now is for China to choose what she wants to make of the language now increasingly at her disposal.

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VITA

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